

Rise and evolution of Revenge Tragedy



BRAC University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Monira Siddique

I.D. 05303007

Department of English and Humanities

April 2009

**The Rise and Evolution of
Revenge tragedy**

A Thesis

Submitted to the Department of English and Humanities

Of

BRAC University

By

Monira Siddique

Student id: 05303007

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree

Of

Bachelor of Arts in English

Acknowledgement

First of all, I would like to thank my thesis supervisor Sohana Manzoor for always being there for me and providing me with all kinds of help. I would also like to thank Professor Syed Manzoorul Islam and Rukhsana Rahim Chowdhury for introducing me to the most interesting form of literature – Drama.

A very special thanks to Tanjir Hasan Ratul and Shehrin Nazrul.

Contents

Abstract	1
Chapter 1	2
Introduction	
Chapter 2	11
The starting of a new convention: <i>The Spanish Tragedy</i>	
Chapter 3	28
The genre reached the zenith of its artistic maturity with <i>Hamlet</i>	
Chapter 4	46
The play added a new dimension to the genre: <i>The Duchess of Malfi</i>	
Chapter 5	61
Conclusion	
Work Cited	69

Abstract

For the people of all ages drama has always been one of the most favorite forms of literature. Within the genre of drama, there are various forms of plays. However, it is seen that a particular form of play becomes popular in a particular period of time. For example, revenge tragedy was very popular among the audience of very late sixteenth century to the mid seventeenth century. Within this short period, which covers three different ages—Elizabethan, Jacobean and Caroline period, revenge tragedy changes a lot. In my dissertation paper by examining the plays of Thomas Kyd's play *The Spanish Tragedy*, William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, I have made an attempt to show how these changes took place and the gradual development in English drama.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Drama is probably one of the oldest and most interesting forms of literature. The word 'drama' comes from Classical Greek word δράμα, *dráma* that is derived from Classical Greek word δράω, *dráō* – means "to do". In Ancient Greece, plays were used to be read out before a huge audience. However, with time plays started being staged with all its characters carrying out the actions. There are different types of drama. Romantic play, comedy, tragedy, tragicomedy, masque plays these are all different forms of drama. However, it is very difficult to say that which form of drama is most popular among the audience, because with time audience's taste change. For example, revenge tragedy was very popular in the 16th -17th century among a specific audience under a particular situation but after that the situation gradually changed and under a different situation, revenge tragedy lost its appeal among the new audience.

If we want to know more about revenge tragedy, we should first know what tragedy is. The genre of tragedy is rooted in the Greek plays of Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles. One of the earliest works of literary criticism, the *Poetics* of the Greek philosopher Aristotle, includes a discussion on tragedy based in part upon the plays of Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles. According to Aristotle's *Poetics*, tragedy depicts the downfall of a good person through some personal 'flaw' in his character or misjudgment

and it produces suffering and insight on the part of the protagonist and arousing pity and fear on the part of the audience. In *Poetics*, Aristotle also mentions the importance of having five acts and maintaining the three unities-unity of time, unity of place and unity of action. Anagnorisis, hamartia, hubris, nemesis and peripeteia are some very important terms explained in *Poetics* which fit into Aristotle's definition of tragedy. Tragedy first achieved its greatness in Attica (the region surrounding Athens) in ancient Greece. There tragedy had developed out of religious festivals that celebrated the cult of the god Dionysus. The stories of Greek tragedies generally focused on a gifted protagonist, who suffered incredible misfortune through some act of hubris, and then came a moment of sudden understanding of some things that had occurred in the past and finally the tragedy ends with the death of the protagonist. During this time all kinds of tragedies were immensely popular among the Greek audience. But after this brief successes of tragedy there was very long gap when tragedy was almost absent from the Western world. After that, some Roman playwrights attempted to imitate the Greek masters, but could not make much progress. In addition, tragedy was almost entirely absent from the Christian drama in the fifteenth and early sixteenth century. This was the time when playwrights focused more on celebrating the morality of Christ through the morality plays. Tragedy regained its lost glory only with the Elizabethans and then once again it established as a living art form.

It was the Roman playwright Lucius Annaeus Seneca who first established the form of revenge tragedy. Seneca was a Roman statesman, philosopher, orator, dramatist and eminent writer of the Silver Age of Latin literature. He was very much influenced by Aristotle's theory of tragedy. Following the theory of tragedy found in Aristotle's *Poetics* he tried to write different types of tragedies and revenge tragedy is one of them. Seneca employed different ideas in his tragedies and most of them were originally taken from the Greeks. Some of Seneca's stories originated from the Greek playwrights, like *Agamemnon* and *Thyestes* which dealt with bloody family histories and revenge. Like other Athenian dramatists in the fifth century, Seneca's tragedies also dealt with Greek myths. He wrote eight tragedies in verse and those were free adaptations of ancient Greek legends. Seneca's plays are *Hercules Furens*, *Agamemnon*, *Thyestes*, *Oedipus*, *Medea*, *Phaedra*, *The Trojan Women*, *The Phoenician Women*. Though Seneca invented the genre of revenge tragedy, it was not that much popular in his lifetime. Revenge tragedy reached its Zenith of popularity in 16th-17th century London. Along with the genre, Seneca also was very much there in the Elizabethan air. Jasper Heywood and others translated his works into the English language between 1559 and 1581. And by that time his tragedies were well known among the English literate. Though there were many translated Greek and Roman tragedies in Elizabethan period, the earliest English tragedy was *Gorboduc*. Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton wrote it in 1561. It was first performed in 1562 in front of the members of the inner Temple at their

Christmas festivals. This was also the first English play to use blank verse that had been introduced into English poetry only a few years before.

The genre of English revenge tragedy started from the mid-1580s to the early 1640s that is from the Elizabethan to the Caroline period. Though Seneca wrote several kinds of tragedies, the Elizabethan playwrights were particularly attracted to his revenge tragedies such as *Thyestes*, *Medea*, and *Agamemnon*. Seneca's revenge tragedies dramatized murder, betrayal and blood revenge on the villain or villains. He showed all of the passions in excess, such as hate, jealousy, and love. He also used many sensational elements, such as supernatural phenomena, cruel torture, and bloody violence. Critics say that no author exercised a wider or deeper influence upon the Elizabethan mind or upon the Elizabethan form of tragedy than did Seneca. For the dramatists of the Renaissance Italy, France and England, classical tragedy meant only the ten Latin plays of Seneca and they do not even count the plays of Great Greek playwrights like Euripides, Aeschylus and Sophocles. Other critics have argued that, the Italian *nouvelle* provided another literary source for the revenge tragedy in addition to Seneca's influence. Machiavellian villains, sexual betrayals, and bloody feuds between rival families were the common features of many of these Italian tales. Again, some other scholars have claimed that revenge tragedy was influenced by the medieval *contemptus mundi* tradition.

Nearly all of the major playwrights of the time contributed to this class of drama, including Thomas Kyd, William Shakespeare, John Marston, George Chapman, Cyril Tourneur, Thomas Middleton, John Webster, James Shirley, and John Ford. According to most literary scholars Kyd initiated the dramatic archetype of revenge tragedy with his *The Spanish Tragedy*. Though the exact date of when the play was written is not known, it is believed to be performed some time between 1585 to 1589. with this play Kyd invented the basic formulas of the genre and his successors added creative new layers of dramatic tension, characterization, imagery, and ideological representation.

It is a list of some revenge tragedies.

Author	Title	Year
Kyd	<i>The Spanish Tragedy</i>	1587
Marlowe	<i>The Jew of Malta</i>	1589
Shakespeare	<i>Titus Andronicus</i>	1594
Marston	<i>Antonio's Revenge</i>	1600
Shakespeare	<i>Hamlet</i>	1601
Chettle	<i>Hoffman</i>	1602
Tourneur (?)	<i>The Revenger's Tragedy</i>	1606
Tourneur	<i>The Atheist's Tragedy</i>	1609
Chapman	<i>The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois</i>	1610

Beaumont and Fletcher	<i>The Maid Tragedy</i>	1610
Webster	<i>The White Devil</i>	1612
Webster	<i>The Duchess of Malfi</i>	1614
Fletcher	<i>Valentinian</i>	1614
Middleton	<i>Women Beware Women</i>	1621
Missinger	<i>The Duke of Milan</i>	1621
Middleton and Rowley	<i>The Changeling</i>	1622
Ford	<i>'Tis Pity She's a Whore</i>	1632
Ford	<i>The Broken Heart</i>	1630-33
Shirley	<i>The Cardinal</i>	1641

The typical themes and devices of revenge tragedy are- a wronged revenge-seeker, ghosts, madness, delay, sinister intrigue, sexual viciousness, a play-within-the-play, torture, multiple murders, etc. And by 1599 this formula was so commonly and recurrently in use in revenge tragedies that it could be disdained. The introduction to *A Warning for Fair Women* parodies the typical revenge tragedy plot, which says

How some damnd tyrant, to obtain a crowne,
Stabs, hangs, impoysons, smothers, cutteth throats,
And then a Chorus too comes howling in,
And tels us of the worrying of a cat,
Then of filthie whining ghost,

Lapt in some fowle sheet, of a leather stickt,
And cries *Vindicta*, revenge, revenge.

Despite all the mockeries of such clichés, the revenge tragedy formula was extremely popular among the English audience until the Parliament closed the theatres in 1642. Usually the setting of a revenge tragedy is the court and all the main characters are related to that court. And, most of the times the wrongdoer is the King or holds a much higher rank in the court than the protagonist. Playwrights deliberately choose court setting because it is the place of high-level corruption, betrayal, deception, and conspiracy. In all revenge tragedies first and foremost, a crime is committed and for various reasons laws and justice cannot punish the crime so the protagonist goes through with the revenge in spite of many obstacles. The main character then usually has a period of doubt, where he tries to decide whether to go forward with the revenge and the decision-making process usually involves tough and complex planning. Some other typical features are the appearance of a ghost, to get the avenger to go through with the deed. The protagonist usually has a very close relationship with the audience through soliloquies and asides. The original crime that will eventually be avenged is nearly always sexual or violent or both. The crime has been committed against a family member of the protagonist. After the ghost persuades him to commit his deed, a hesitation first occurs and then there is a delay from his side by his actual or acted out madness before killing the murderer. The avenger or his trusted accomplices

must take out the revenge and they also die at the moment of success or even during the course of revenge. The early plays of this genre seem to apply these features regularly. However, the later plays lack one or more of these characteristics.

Revenge tragedy was immensely popular among the 16th and 17th century audience. Many things work together to make this genre popular. Once a formula has been locked into its audience's mind, it is easy to elaborate and manipulate in a number of ways. But the initial success of the formula, and its early fame depends on some factors. Popularity of a certain type of drama depends on a particular audience of a particular time and place. The drama has to represent the subjects in a way that are of particular concern to that audience. The simple fact of the early and enduring popularity of revenge tragedies is- that it represented some of the most disturbing political and religious issues of the time. Though in the plays playwrights had used foreign corrupted courts and the consequences of that corruption, the underline implication was to show the on going corruption and malfunction of the English court. Now one question can be asked that why a form of drama that celebrated 'revenge' that has strict prohibition in Christianity became popular among the English (Christian) audience. The fact is sixteenth century was the time of protestant reformation and there was a clash between Catholicism and Protestantism. People started questioning the orthodox Catholic beliefs. Probably for this reason audience liked to watch something

that go against the Catholic belief and this could be one of the reasons why revenge tragedy became so popular in that particular time. Moreover, this was the time of English renaissance when people relied more on human capability than fate or predestination. Audience liked to see a man taking revenge by his own hand rather than leaving it on God.

Critics have sought to understand the popularity of revenge tragedies from a cultural and historical position. They have observed that the revenge tragedy appeared at a particular time in English history. According to these critics three occurrences have worked in the background for the rise of revenge tragedy; firstly when people were beginning to question the fundamental relationship between religion and the universe, secondly when the English nation was imperiled by the threat of the Spanish Armada, and thirdly when English society endured the uncertainty of succession between the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I. Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights used revenge tragedy as a device to show their concerns about such provocative issues as a repressive religious tradition, political corruption, and social malaise. People should therefore never think that revenge was expected by Elizabethan society. Church, State and the regular morals of people in that age did not accept revenge. Although they loved to see it in plays, it was considered sinful and it was utterly condemned.

Chapter 2 The starting of a new convention: *The Spanish Tragedy*

The Spanish Tragedy is one of the most important plays in the history of English drama. It enriched the genre of drama by adding a new form of tragedy that is revenge tragedy. From Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* the second-generation revenge tragedy started. The first generation revenge tragedy is of Greek and mainly Senecan style. The exact year when the play was written is not sure. Ben Jonson in the Introduction to his play *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), listed *The Spanish Tragedy* as being "five and twenty or thirty years" old. If we take the time period literally then the possible range of date for this play would be 1584–89. there are many argument about the date and the most agreed upon date is 1587. The play is mainly about the father who avenges his son's murder.

The Spanish Tragedy begins with the ghost of Don Andrea accompanied by the spirit of Revenge telling his history. He talks about his beloved Bel-imperia¹ and why he went to the war² and how he was killed there. He also says that he went to underworld and there the Queen of the underworld Proserpine has sent him again in the upper world along with Revenge to see his murder avenged. In the Upper world, we get to see Bel-imperia falling in love with Andrea's friend Horatio. On the other hand, in the other side Bel-imperia's brother Lorenzo and the war captive Balthazar, the

¹ The niece of the King of Spain.

² Between Spain and Portugal.

Prince of Portugal becomes good friends. Balthazar too falls in love with Bel-imperia. Lorenzo also wants his sister to get married to Balthazar, so he does every possible thing to make sure that the marriage takes place. When Lorenzo comes to know that Bel-imperia is in love with Horatio, Lorenzo kills the latter with the help of Balthazar, Perdringano, and Serberine. After killing Horatio, he takes all the necessary steps to conceal his crime. Seeing Horatio's dead body, his parents become almost mad. From Bel-imperia's letter, Hieronimo gets to know about his son's murder. Hieronimo goes to King for justice but Lorenzo makes sure that he cannot talk to him (the King). After lamenting a lot for his dead son, Hieronimo decides to avenge his son's murder. Bel-imperia promises to help Hieronimo to carry out his revenge. In between, Lorenzo gets rid of Serberine and Perdringano. On one hand, Hieronimo hatches a very Machiavellian plan against Balthazar and Lorenzo and on the other, Portuguese Viceroy arrives Spain to witness the wedding of his son Balthazar and Bel-imperia. Hieronimo is supposed to stage a drama before the Portuguese Viceroy to entertain him. He makes both Balthazar and Lorenzo take part in his play Soliman and Perseda. Hieronimo gives Balthazar the role of Soliman who is killed by the character Perseda played by Bel-imperia and Lorenzo the role of the knight of Rhodes who is killed by the role Hieronimo plays- Pasha. On the stage in front of all the audience Bel-imperia and Hieronimo actually stab both Balthazar and Lorenzo to death according to the plan. However, after stabbing Balthazar, Bel-imperia stabs herself and commits suicide. At the end of the tragic play, Hieronimo enters the stage with

Horatio's dead body and explains everything. Hieronimo then also commits suicide though the King tried a lot to know more about the plot. Before committing suicide, he stabs the Duke of Castile (Lorenzo's father). The play ends with the satisfaction of the ghost of Andrea.

While writing *The Spanish Tragedy*, Kyd was certainly influenced to a large degree by the work of the ancient, Roman dramatist Seneca. Kyd took some very important dramatic devices either directly from his plays or was influenced by his style. The very themes of revenge which is the principal motive of the actions in *The Spanish Tragedy*, is a very well known Senecan theme. The characters of the Ghost and the personification of Revenge are direct imitation from Seneca's play *Thyestes*. In Seneca's *Thyestes* the ghost of Tantalus gives a opening speech along with the spirit of Fury and a similar thing is done in *The Spanish Tragedy* as well. Then again the Ghost describeing his journey into the underworld is also there in Seneca's *Thyestes*, *Agamemnon* and *Phaedra*. Hieronimo also give references from two of the Senecan plays, *Agamemnon* and *Troades*³. The character of the Old Man, Senex, is also a direct reference from Seneca. Another thing Kyd share with Seneca that is a certain interest in bloodshedding and horror. Kyd's *The Spanish tragedy* is full of blood shedding. Kyd also uses a general stylistic feature of Seneca; he uses Seneca's Stichomythia⁴.

³ In his monologue in Act III, scene xiii.

⁴ Stichomythia: Dialogue in alternate lines of verse. It is used in Act I, Scene iv.

It is not that Kyd blindly imitated things from Seneca, whatever took he modified them and sometimes presented those in a more presentable way. For example, Kyd made the ghost a part of the chorus but in *Thyestes* the Ghost leaves after the prologue. Seneca was also very interested in the curse that pursues a family for several generations, but Kyd dealt with the kind of tragedy that ends within a particular generation.

It is very hard for any genre of literature to be popular without a proper context. And *The Spanish Tragedy* is also no exception. Though the theme of revenge was unacceptable in Elizabethan times for political reasons, the actual status of revenge in the Elizabethan mind is hard to define. In Christian society, seeking private revenge was heavily discouraged. For they believed in *Vindicta mihi*; "Vengeance is mine, sayeth the lord; I will repay." meaning that it is God's responsibility to take revenge against the wrongdoers, not of men. At the same time, there was a kind of fascination towards the pagan custom of seeking private revenge that is tooth for a tooth and eye for an eye, which largely came from the Anglo-Saxon and Danish influences on English culture. Apart from the religious obligation, the increasingly centralized law of the time did not support private revenge. In such a situation, people were confused about the moral status of revenge. Publicly the revenge, which was rather an act of impulse, was more preferable than the premeditated cold-blooded revenge. Though in real life they did not like Machiavellianism, they were greatly interested to see the elements on stage. Elizabethan audience

liked the conspiracy, manipulation, and bloodletting actions a lot. And that's why most of the avengers of Elizabethan revenge tragedy were seen to employ deception and trickery to achieve their ends. Another very important thing Kyd had used to popularize his play was the strong anti-Spanish sentiment that was prevailing among the Elizabethans. Kyd wrote this play in the late 1580s and 1588 was the time when first Spanish navy was built by Philip II of Spain to invade England. Though the fleet was defeated, since then Spain was regarded England's most hated enemy by the Elizabethans. So there is a possibility that English audience in Elizabethan time might have liked to see the moral as well as physical destruction of the royal lines of both Spain and Portugal.

The main theme of any revenge tragedy is obviously revenge. Therefore, the central theme of *The Spanish Tragedy* is revenge. Since it was the first revenge tragedy, Kyd had the great pressure to justify the very theme. He also had to make it presentable, so that people do like the play. In this play, all the main characters feel in one way or the other injured by one or more of the others and each of them seeks to avenge the injury. Andrea seeks revenge for his death in battle at the hand of Balthazar; Bel-imperia wants revenge for the death of her lover Andrea and then the murder of her next lover Horatio; Balthazar and Lorenzo kill Horatio for their desire of revenge on him for having wooed and won Bel-imperia; and Hieronimo pursues revenge for the murder of his son Horatio. The entire plot of the play is the result of desires of

all these characters for revenge on those whom they consider as their enemies. Since it was the first play of the kind that contradicts with the Christian belief that revenge should be left to God, Kyd had to explain many things. "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, sayeth the lord" (Romans.xii.19) - Hieronimo quotes from Bible in Act III, scene xiii, which is also the official Elizabethan attitude toward revenge. At the beginning of the play, the ghost of Andrea goes to the underworld and the Queen of the Underworld Proserpine (Persephone) officially sanctions the revenge. Being accompanied by the spirit of Revenge Andrea is sent back to the world of the living to see his murder avenged. Therefore, from the beginning of the play the audience know that whatever happens in the play is sanctioned by divine will. Hieronimo is confused whether to take the revenge or not, for he needs Proserpine's consent to execute the revenge. Hieronimo once mentions that if he had the permission he would have avenged his son's murder (Act III, Scene xiii). However, he does not know but the audience are aware of the fact that Proserpine has already sanctioned his 'grant'.

Hieronimo several times tries to connect revenge with justice. He goes to the king to do something about the murder of his son but justice is simply not there. Assuming Senex as Horatio, Hieronimo says-

And art thou come, Horatio, from the depth

To ask for justice in this upper earth?

To tell thy father thou art unrevenged

... ...
 Go back my son, complain to Aeacus,
 For here's no justice; gentle boy be gone,
 For justice is exiled from the earth
 (Act III, Scene xiii, 133-35, 139-41)

Hieronimo knows that since both the murderers belong to high authority there is very little chance to get justice for the murder of his son. It is the King who should punish any wrong doer on behalf of God, but in this case, the King is not performing his duty. Therefore, Hieronimo decides to avenge Horatio's death to do justice with him. And after meeting Bel-imperia Hieronimo starts believing that Heaven is on their side. Here Kyd tries to represent Hieronimo as somebody who has been chosen by god to avenge the murders of Andrea and Horatio. Therefore, his act is a service to God and not one of the seven deadly sins. Hieronimo is the Knight-Marshal of Spain; his job is to confer justice. And he is a very just judge. One of the three citizens remark about Hieronimo

... for learning and for law,
 There is not any advocate in Spain
 That can prevail, or will take half the pain
 That he will, in pursuit of equity.
 (Act III, scene xiii, 51-54)

Kyd gives the impression that Hieronimo is the man of justice, and what he will do, will do for justice. Hieronimo occupies such a position from where only two ways are open for him; either to avenge Horatio's murder or to commit suicide. And suicide means another death of an innocent, like that of Isabella. To see this suicide, the reactions of the audience would automatically be that, if somebody has to die then why not it is the wrongdoers. Today these murderers have done wrong to Hieronimo tomorrow they would cause harm to others. And again, when Balthazar comes to know about Serberine's murder by Perdringano, he hastens to the Knight Marshal to make sure that the murderer Perdringano is punished with death sentence:

Assure thee, Don Lorenzo, he shall die.

Or else his Highness hardly shall deny.

Meanwhile I'll haste the Marshal-Sessions.

For die he shall for this his damned deed.

(Act III, scene iv, 34-37)

Here lies the true genius of Kyd, he make Balthazar justifying his own murder at the hand of Hieronimo. Balthazar says that the punishment for murder should be death. Since Balthazar and Lorenzo has taken an innocent life, they also should be punished with the same penalty as Pedrinzano. If in the place of Lorenzo and Balthazar someone else had committed the crime, Hieronimo would have passed death sentence on him with the King's approval. However, since both the chief murderers are of noble born, it is very likely that the King would not let them die. But, before law all criminals are equal and they should

be punished at any cost. Therefore, to punish both the murderers Hieronimo takes law in his own hands and kills them towards the end of the play. Kyd seems to adore the Pagan idea of revenge that is tooth for a tooth and eye for an eye. He also projects that revenge is human nature, if Balthazar wants to avenge his servant's death then why not Hieronimo would avenge his son's death.

For a revenge tragedy, the character of a villain is a must. At first, the villain does something really bad of the kind of rape or murder to the near or dear one's of the avenger and in reaction the avenger chases revenge on the villain. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, Kyd introduces a villain of Machiavellian type. Lorenzo is the first Machiavellian villain in English drama. He is arrogant, cunning, manipulative, devious, and deceitful. He is very active and functioning through out the play. From the beginning of the play, he starts his Machiavellian activities. The first time when Lorenzo speaks, he speaks of Machiavelli. Horatio captured Balthazar in the war but in front of the King Lorenzo claims that he captured the Prince. Then again, when he decides the matrimony between Balthazar and Bel-imperia; he does every possible thing to make sure that it takes place. At first he offers a reward to Perdringano to get some information about Bel-imperia's inclination and when he fails in his attempt he threatens to kill the latter. Lorenzo seems to have a good understanding of how to get his work done. Immediately after hearing about the love affair between Bel-imperia and Horatio, he plans to kill him. With the

help of Balthazar, Perdringano, and Serberine, Lorenzo kills Horatio. However, he does not stop after killing Horatio; he takes necessary steps to conceal his crime as well. He makes sure that Hieronimo cannot go to the King or meet with Bel-imperia. He gets rid of Serberine and Perdringano in a very cunning way. He sends Perdringano to kill Serberine whom he himself has asked to be there in the garden. And when Perdringano kills Serberine, Lorenzo makes sure that some watchmen are there to capture Perdringano red handed. Since, Serberine was Prince Balthazar's attendant he (Balthazar) vows to have Perdringano punished with death sentence, and this is how Lorenzo wants Balthazar to react. Lorenzo becomes very happy that everything is happening according to his plan:

... this fits our former policy,
 And thus experience bids the wish to deal;
 I lay the plot he prosecutes the point;
 I set the trap, he breaks the worthless twigs,
 And sees not that wherewith the bird was limed.
 Thus hopeful men, that mean to hold their own,
 Must look like fowlers to their dearest friends,
 He runs to kill whom I have help to catch,
 And no man knows it was my reaching fatch.
 'Tis hard to trust unto a multitude,
 Or any one, in mine opinion,
 When men themselves their secrets will reveal.

(Act III, scene iv, 38-49)

He is so wicked that he does not even inform Balthazar about his plan. Here he uses Balthazar as a tool to carry out the plot he has hatched.

Ultimately, Lorenzo falls into the trap laid by Hieronimo. Hieronimo tricks him in accepting a role in the dramatic performance, which Hieronimo plans to put up for the entertainment of the Portuguese Viceroy. In spite of all his shrewdness and his capacity for intrigue, Lorenzo at this time fails to understand Hieronimo's actual motive. As a consequence of his having agreed to play a role of Erastro in Hieronimo's tragic drama, Lorenzo is stabbed to death by Hieronimo on the stage.

Not only Lorenzo applies Machiavelli, we see Hieronimo being Machiavellian as well. When he realizes that he will not get justice from the king, he decides to punish the murderers himself. Since both the murderers possess immense power, he hatches a good plan to kill both of them together. He takes Bel-imperia with him to help him. He makes both Lorenzo and Balthazar take part in his tragic play Soliman and Perseda. In Hieronimo's play, Balthazar plays the role of Soliman who is killed by the character Perseda played by Bel-imperia, and Lorenzo plays the role of the knight of Rhodes who is killed by the role Hieronimo is playing - Pasha. On the stage, Bel-imperia and Hieronimo actually stab both Balthazar and Lorenzo to death. Thus, Both Andrea and Horatio's murders are avenged.

The masque is one of the most important devices of this play. There are two masques and one dumb show in this play. Both the masques are presented by Hieronimo and the dumb show is presented by Revenge. The dumb show is less important than the masques. When the Ghost of Andrea becomes very angry to see the reconciliation between Lorenzo and Hieronimo, Revenge shows him the dumb show. It shows a wedding party, at first happy, then descended upon by Hymen, god of marriage, who blows out the wedding torches and extinguishes them with blood. The underline meaning of the dumb show is that the supposed marriage of Bel-imperia and Balthazar will not take place. The dumb show is there to give the audience a hint of what is coming up next. However, both the masques are immensely important. The first masque conveys a message of reconciliation between Spain and Portugal and the last one Hieronimo's revenge on Lorenzo and Balthazar. One might think that the first masque is not that much important. But I would argue that the first masque play is equally important as the second one. In fact, by keeping two masques in the play Kyd shows his true genius.

The first masque play held in act I, scene v. Hieronimo presents this masque to entertain the Portuguese ambassador. Both the Spanish King and the Portuguese ambassador enjoy the masque. Though it is not explicit, there is an implicit message of reconciliation in the masque. It enacts the past shameful defeat of both Portugal and Spain in the hand of small England. But

to recall the shameful past is not Hieronimo's intention. It is very likely that his masque is based on a very well known philosophy that 'my enemy's enemy is my friend'. Since England is the common enemy for both Spain and Portugal, they should be friends and together form a greater power. From the masque, we get to know Hieronimo's presence of mind, because he produced the masque based on the most appropriate thought of that time. Moreover, the success of the first masque gives Hieronimo the opportunity to produce another masque in front of the Portuguese Viceroy.

The second masque is the most important masque. In this masque, Hieronimo carries out his revenge on Lorenzo and Balthazar. This time he presents a tragic masque Soliman and Preseda. Hieronimo writes the story of the masque in such a way that it requires all the characters to die. In the play he and Bel-imperia are supposed to kill Lorenzo and Balthazar on the stage. Lorenzo and Balthazar had killed Horatio in secret and took all the necessary measures not to disclose their crime (sin). However, Hieronimo plans to kill them in front of all the people. He believes that by killing them he is not committing any sin, rather he is punishing them for the crime they have committed to God. It seems as if Kyd wants to say that both the kings are there along with other high officials but nobody could save the murderers, because the King of the Kings have decided this punishment to them.

The murder of Horatio is the greatest possible misfortune that can befall on Hieronimo and Isabella. Hieronimo is almost mad in the grief of his

son's murder and Isabella fully loses her sanity. Kyd uses this madness as a tool. Kyd deliberately shows two types of madness in the two characters in the play, so that the audience can compare and contrast between them. Being Horatio's mother Isabella cannot bear the pain of her son's death and loses her sanity completely. In her insane condition, she keeps on talking about avenging Horatio's death. She wants the murder to be avenged but does not know how. She curses the murderers several times and declares to avenge the Horatio's murder herself. Actually, she is not capable of doing anything for his son instead of lamenting. And when the pain of losing an eligible son like Horatio overtakes her she commits suicide. Hieronimo is also grieved. He had to do the most painful thing of a father that is to bring down his young son's dead body from the tree. Like Isabella, he also becomes mad. However, his madness is different from that of Isabella's. His madness can be defined as sane madness. In his state of madness Hieronimo also once thinks for committing suicide, but then immediately he changes his mind that if he commits suicide then who will be there to avenge Horatio's murder.

Sometimes Hieronimo's madness seems phony and sometimes it seems real. In the court, he cannot control his grief and the actual cry of a lamenting father comes out. He shouts for justice and cry in the name of Horatio. He acts madly in the court. He is restless; he is desperate. But when he sees that Lorenzo will not let him go near the King and even if he does talk to the King, Lorenzo might kill Hieronimo the way he killed Horatio.

Therefore, he controls himself. From the instant controlling of his rage makes his madness, seem feigned. Before the three citizens he pretence to be mad again but when he sees the old man who has the same grief as his, he shows his sympathy for him. Hieronimo uses his madness as a tool against his enemy to cover up his real intention. He knows that his enemies are far more powerful than he is. And if he declares a open challenge to them, they would kill him with in the blink of an eye. So very carefully with out arousing any suspicion to any one he slowly builds the steps toward his goal. When people think that he is 'insane', in reality he is 'sanest' of all. And here his madness differs from Isabella's madness. Isabella's madness leads her to commit suicide though she wanted to avenge her son's murder at any cost but Hieronimo's madness helps him to reach his goal.

A foil character of Isabella is Bel-imperia. She is the main female character of the play. She is the daughter of the Duke of Castile and the niece of the Spanish King. At first she is in love with Andrea and after his death she falls in love with Horatio. But her misfortune is that both of her lovers get killed one by one. She is wooed by Balthazar, one of the killers of her lovers Balthazar and is pressurized to marry him by her father, brother and uncle. But she is a very strong woman and decides to avenge both Andrea and Horatio's murder.

Kyd tries to create Bel-imperia in the mould of one of the strongest heroine of history, but he fails badly. Bel-imperia is no doubt strong but at times she seems to be emotionless. She is very calculative and much focused in her intention. Immediately after Andrea's death, she takes Horatio as her next lover. She does not break down. In fact, she is the first one to think of 'revenge'. She says, "I'll love Horatio" (Act I, scene iv, 67) as if after much thinking she has decided to love Horatio to achieve her goal. She also displays her ability in stichomythia between her, Balthazar, and Lorenzo in the situation when her first lover has just died. She also shows her presences of mind by informing Balthazar that her brother is using him as an 'instrument'. She is so determined that she does not even think twice before planning to kill her own brother. This is again a weak point in her character that she does not show any sisterly love or soft corner for her own brother. She should have some kind of feelings for Lorenzo no matter how wicked he is. She is strongly determined to avenge both her lovers' murder. Even in her captive condition, she manages to send Hieronimo the message about his son's murderers. She also meets him personally and reproaches him for not taking any measure to avenge Horatio's death. She then promises to help him in killing Lorenzo and Balthazar. With Hieronimo's help, she succeeds in killing Balthazar on the stage. She shows her individuality by taking her own life. Kyd presents Bel-imperia as very strong woman but her extra ordinary strength sometimes makes her mechanical.

Kyd does not give a very good ending of the play. After such a heavy loss of life what happens to the King and most importantly, what happens to the country is not told. The play does not give answer of these questions. Moreover, any kind of hope or any sign of positivism is not shown at the end of the play.

Chapter 3 The genre reached the zenith of its artistic maturity with *Hamlet*

After the huge success of Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, many contemporary playwrights tried their hands in revenge tragedy. Many of them blindly copied Kydian formula with or without slightest changes, but William Shakespeare was one of those few playwrights who started experimenting with the genre. Though Shakespeare was certainly influenced by other playwrights and borrowed many ideas from their plays, he represented them in a very different way. What was distinctive about Shakespeare was his combination of the elements that were scattered in the works of other playwrights of his time. And this is where Shakespeare differs from others. He is superior to other playwrights for the extreme diversity of his talent. He added a new dimension to the genre and with *Hamlet*, the genre reached to the peak of its artistic maturity. The play was first published in 1603. It has all the characteristics of a typical revenge tragedy but it itself is not a typical revenge tragedy. It is story of a son avenging his fathers' murder.

The play begins with the ghost and it is the spirit of the recently deceased King of Denmark. The ghost talks with his son the Prince Hamlet. The ghost tells him about how his own brother Claudius has killed him and asks his son to avenge his murder. Hamlet immediately decides to avenge his father's death. However, Hamlet is very thoughtful and he keeps on thinking about many things especially about death and afterlife. He plans to stages a

play closely related to the sequence that the ghost tells him, for to see Claudius's reaction to the play he will be able to understand whether Claudius is guilty. When the play is acted out Claudius reacts violently and proves himself guilty to Hamlet. He (Hamlet) right away goes to kill Claudius, but finds him confessing for his crime. At this time, he is called in his mother, Gertrude's room. There, Hamlet mistakenly kills Polonius who is hiding behind the curtain. Claudius sends him to England and plans to kill him, but Hamlet succeeds to come back again to Denmark. By the time, he comes back Ophelia commits suicide in her father's grief. In her funeral Hamlet has a fight with Leartes and a fencing match is arranged between the two afterwards. Claudius poisons Leartes's blade, he also poisons a goblet, in which he plans to offer drinks to Hamlet from time to time within the match. Both Hamlet and Leartes are hurt by the poisoned blade. And Gertrude mistakenly drinks from that goblet and dies. Leartes reveals Claudius' plan to kill Hamlet. At this point of time, enraged Hamlet kills Claudius. Leartes, Gertrude, Claudius and Hamlet die on the spot.

The story of *Hamlet* is not Shakespeare's own, he borrowed the storyline from somewhere else. Many possible sources are out there, from where Shakespeare probably has taken the idea of *Hamlet*. He could have taken the story of *Hamlet* from a twelfth-century Latin history of Denmark compiled by Saxo Grammaticus. Saxo in his work used the 'Amleth' instead of Hamlet. Later in the Sixteenth century Saxo's story was translated into

French by the French writer François de Belleforest in his collection *Histoires Tragiques*. It is also said that *Hamlet* is closely based on Tomas Kyd's play *Ur-Hamlet* of which no traces can be found now. Again, Shakespeare was certainly influenced by Tomas Kyd's play *The Spanish Tragedy*. However, Shakespeare modified the source materials entirely and was able to make a remarkable revenge tragedy out of an ordinary one. He presented it with the most fundamental themes and problems of the Renaissance.⁵

Shakespeare did not need to justify the theme of revenge, because by the time he was writing *Hamlet*, it was already established and immensely popular. Therefore, he had a good chance to explore with other themes. He used Renaissance as the background of his play. Renaissance was all about knowing the potential capabilities of a human being along with the limitations. It was believed that life is not one-dimensional; rather there are multiple ways of looking at life. Rationality and science were given more prominence. People were encouraged to ask questions and explore the unknown. It generated a new interest in human experience, and produced a vast optimism about the potential scope of human understanding. Hamlet's famous speech in Act II is very much a renaissance thought:

What a piece of work is a man! How noble

in reason, how infinite in faculty, in form and moving how

express

⁵ The Renaissance is a vast cultural phenomenon that began in fifteenth-century Italy with the recovery of classical Greek and Latin texts that had been lost to the Middle Ages.

and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension
how

like a god! the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals-
(Act II, Scene ii, 286–289)

Hamlet is a Renaissance man. His character has an universal appeal and significance. People of all ages find him as one of them mainly because of the experience he goes through arouses a similar experience in themselves. He is put into an odd situation; he is to choose between his responsibility and his own happiness. Hamlet's mind wavers between reason and emotion. Hamlet is put into such a peculiar situation from where any quick decision, of what he should do, cannot be made. As a Renaissance man he does not immediately believes the ghost. On the other hand, he himself is driven by those impulses coming from seeing his father's ghost. He says "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, /Than are dreamt of in your philosophy." (Act I, scene v, 166-67). Though he wants to be rational, he is unable to question the rationality of those impulses.

Like any other revenge tragedy, the primary theme of this play is also revenge. However, Shakespeare's treatment of revenge is far different from those of his contemporaries. The way the plot develops in a revenge tragedy, we do not see that in *Hamlet*. In addition, the actions, which are expected from a conventional revenge tragedy hero, are never performed by Hamlet. He is

extremely philosophical and contemplative. He is particularly drawn to difficult questions or questions with no answers. He constantly questions about afterlife, the wisdom of suicide, about what happens to bodies after they die and so on. At a time, it feels as if he asks these many questions to avoid his supposed action. He gets some other opportunities to take revenge on Claudius, but remains passive. Through Hamlet's indecisiveness and incapability of action Shakespeare explore the theme that human potentialities are not limitless. Hamlet has a good reason for taking revenge; has the strength of taking it, but the only thing he lacks is his will power. He is not happy with the responsibility to avenge his father's murder; he says in "O cursed spite, / That ever I was born to see it right." (Act I, scene v, 189-90) Shakespeare contradicts the Renaissance belief that reason would alone lead to a better understanding of how to act in a particular situation. He shows that not everyone can do everything. Hamlet is a scholar, a poet, a philosopher, a lover and for a man like him it is not very easy to kill his own uncle. Moreover, killing Claudius would mean the end of his own life as well. King Hamlet, Claudius, Gertrude all of them are aged, and they have gone through all the stages of their life, and have enjoyed the journey. But, Hamlet is a promising young man, and could have a very prosperous life ahead. He loves Ophelia; and could have a very happy married life with her. But, he is thrust into such a tough situation from where he has to choose either his own happy and prosperous life without taking the revenge or an uncertain future by

avenging his father's murder. Hamlet takes time to take the decision of what he actually should do and his hesitation is very much understandable.

Hamlet is not at all a fragile and weak character and certainly is not incapable of doing the terrible duty laid on him. From the beginning of the play, Hamlet proves him as a brave and strong character. He without any fear follows the ghost and when his friends were not letting him go near the ghost, he warns them: "Unhand me, gentleman. / By heaven, I'll make a ghost of him that lets me." (Act I, scene iv, 84-85). Then again, he kills the eavesdropper from behind the arras who unfortunately happens to be Polonius, father of his beloved. He also sends his two friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to be executed in England by changing the letter that they were carrying for the execution of Hamlet himself. He is also the first man to board on a pirate ship. The man who can do these many things cannot at least be weak and fragile. The problem with him is that when he is supposed to do some action, he starts contemplating about unnecessary things but when he actually does some action, he does that without giving a second thought. In Hamlet, Shakespeare creates a 'human' character that has limitations as well as qualifications. He is not a larger than life character coming straightly from a mythical story like Hercules. It has to be understood that he is trying to be something totally opposite of what he presently is. There is something in him that prevents him from taking any action against Claudius. However, it is only when Hamlet's

mother Gertrude is also killed by Claudius he becomes violently enraged and finally kills him.

When Claudius kills the King Hamlet, Hamlet does not take any action against him; when Claudius plots against Hamlet, he still does nothing, but Hamlet violently reacts when Gertrude is killed by him. Hamlet is most sensitive about his mother and in this mother-son relationship, Shakespeare establish the theme of incest. And the 'something' that prevents Hamlet to kill his uncle is his 'guilt' of this incestuous feelings towards his mother. Hamlet inwardly feels guilty wondering whether for this reason he feels outraged against his uncle. Though it is not so openly written, some hints are there in the play to prove Hamlet's incestuous desire for his mother. He is furiously angry with his mother for her marriage to his uncle Claudius. He says that what his mother has done is a very shameful for a woman to do and people will lose their respect for her. He also says that even God will be angry with her. He asks of Gertrude with desperation: "... go not to my uncle's bed. / ... /... Refrain tonight. / And that shall lend a kind of easiness /To the next abstinence, the next more easy;"(Act III, scene iv, 160, 166-68). He literally tries his level best to persuade Gertrude not to sleep with him (Claudius). He does not even mind interfering in Gertrude's sexual life:

Not this, by no means, that I bid you do:

Let the bloat King tempt you again to bed,

Pinch wanton on your cheek, call you his mouse,

And let him, for a pair of reechy kisses,
Or paddling in your neck with his damn'd fingers, ...

(Act III, scene iv, 182-86)

Here he speaks with his mother in suggestively sexual terms. It seems that if Gertrude were married to another man other than Claudius, Hamlet would not have behaved so rudely with her mother. Another subtle hint of incestuous relation can also be found in the relationship of Laertes and Ophelia, as Laertes sometimes speaks to his sister in suggestively sexual terms and, at her funeral, leaps into her grave to hold her in his arms.

Like incest, misogyny is also a sex related theme of this play. Hamlet becomes misogynistic after his father's death. He is traumatized by his mother's hasty remarriage to his uncle within a few days of his father's death. Hamlet is not only hurt, he is deeply embarrassed by Gertrude's act of getting married so quickly. And, her disloyal attitude towards her dead husband makes Hamlet hate her. His hatred is so intense that he lost all his respect and faith on the woman sect in general. He now thinks that women are capable of doing all the terrible deeds. He truly loved Ophelia, but her rejection to him deepens his negativity about women. To him every woman is a potential whore and that is why he gives advice to Ophelia: "Get thee to a nunnery. Why, wouldst thou be a / breeder of sinners?". His misogynistic tone is also very much there when he philosophizes about appearance vs. reality in the graveyard scene, he says that he wants to remind the 'young lady', meaning

the entire female species, that 'she' would also shares the same fate as the skulls of the graveyard no matter how thickly she paints her cheeks now. He also says that after death she too would reduce to a mere skull and a few bones in course of time.

In a revenge tragedy some features are distinctly revenge tragedian—presence of a supernatural element, delay, play with in a play, feigned madness of the protagonist, conspiracy are such very important features. All these features are present in *Hamlet*. Hamlet uses some of these features as tools to carry out his revenge. The gradual development of his character can be vividly seen through his use of these features as device.

The ghost plays a very important role in the play. The play even starts with the discussion of the ghost. Since there is no eyewitness of the King's death, nobody knew that he was killed. Therefore, the ghost is the only source from where the information can be found. And, it is the ghost that calls for avenging his murder in the play. Hamlet's reaction to the ghost is different from other revenge tragedy heroes those who immediately believes in the ghost's story. He questions the very existence of the ghost and thinks of the possibility that it could be an evil spirit:

... the spirit that I have seen

May be the devil; and the devil hath power

To assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps

Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
 As he is very potent with such spirits,
 Abuses me to damn me.

(Act II, Scene ii, 552-556)

Hamlet does not readily believe the ghost. Therefore, he wants a conformation of the ghost's story about the death of his father. To see the group of actors Hamlet plans to stage a play called the "murder of Gonzalo" to verify the story of his father's murder as narrated by the ghost. He thinks that by judging the reaction of the king he will be able to decide whether he is real murderer: "The play's the thing / Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King (Act II, Scene ii, 557-58).

In staging the play with a play, Hamlet shows his genius in play writing. Hamlet writes some very offensive dialogues in this play to embarrass the King Claudius and the Queen Gertrude. He names the play *The Mousetrap*. Hamlet creates the character of the player queen in a very ridiculous manner. He gives the player queen some very offensive lines and makes her break all the big promises she made to her first husband.

In second husband let me be accurst;
 None wed the second but who kill'd the first.

...

The instances that second marriage move
 Are base respects of thrift, but none of love.

A second time I kill my husband dead,
When second husband kisses me in bed.

(Act III, scene ii, 160-61, 163-66)

From these lines, it seems that Hamlet suspects his mother to be involved with Claudius in killing of King Hamlet. This part of the play has come from Hamlet's own genius, not told by the ghost. To watch the play up to this point Claudius becomes offended: "Have you heard the argument? Is there no offence in't?" (Act III, scene ii, 213). When after the poisoning scene, where Lucianus pour poison to his uncle's ear, Hamlet tells "You shall see anon how the murderer/ gets the love of Gonzalo's wife." Claudius rises and goes away. His strange behavior confirms Hamlet about his guilt.

From the play as Hamlet is conformed about Claudius's guilt, Claudius also gets the impression that it is very likely that somehow Hamlet knows about his crime. Afterwards Claudius becomes weary of him. After the play though Hamlet does not take any effective step to take revenge on Claudius, he (Claudius) takes the initiative to get him (Hamlet) out of his way. Thus, the 'mouse trap' is of great importance, it works for Hamlet and it does the same work for Claudius as well.

Hamlet pretends to be mad to remain unsuspected by Claudius. Though Hamlet says that he will "put an antic disposition on" (Act 1, scene v,

172), his madness sometimes seems real. It is true that he kills Polonius by mistake, but when he discovers that, his victim is Polonius he says:

Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell;
 I took thee for thy better. Take thy fortune;
 Thou find'st to be too busy in some danger.

(Act III, scene iv, 31-33)

He does not feel the least remorse for killing an innocent man like Polonius. Moreover, he is the father of his beloved Ophelia. Even after the killing, he continues lecturing his mother and his this attitude makes him utterly heartless. No sane man can talk like him after killing an innocent man. Then again, he behaves irrationally at Ophelia's funeral. He challenges Laertes to compete with him in expressing his grief over Ophelia's death.

It is true that a few evidences are there to prove Hamlet's madness is real but at the same time, plenty of evidences are there to prove Hamlet's sanity. All his speeches prove him an exceptionally intellectual man. His exchanges of words with others are very witty and full of underline meanings.

Hamlet: Will you play upon this pipe?

... ..

Guildenstern: I know no touch of it, my lord.

Hamlet: It is as easy as lying. Govern these ventages with your
 fingers and thumb, give it breath with your mouth, and
 it will discourse most eloquent music. ...

(Act III, scene ii, 317, 323-25)

And again, the way he talks with Polonius, he (Polonius) understands, "Though this be madness, yet there is method in't." (Act II, scene ii, 200). 'Madness' and 'method' do not go hand in hand, that is where there is madness there could not have any method. Along with Polonius, the King also does not believe that Hamlet is mad:

Love? His affections do not that way tend;
Nor what he spake, though it lack'd form a little,
Was not like madness.

(Act III, scene I, 151-53)

Since Claudius considers Hamlet to be perfectly 'in sense', he starts plotting against him.

Probably the greatest proof of Hamlet's sanity is his soliloquies. There are six soliloquies are there in the play and all of them are not only perfectly coherent and logical; they also contain a deep philosophical meaning.

To be, or not to be: that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them?—To die,—to sleep,—
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks

That flesh is heir to,—'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die,—to sleep;—
To sleep: perchance to dream:—ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause: there's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life;
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of despis'd love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin? who would these fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,—
The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn
No traveller returns,—puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought;

And enterprises of great pith and moment,
With this regard, their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action.

(Act III, scene I, 51-83)

This is the most famous of Hamlet's soliloquies. From this soliloquy, we get to know of what is going on in Hamlet's inner self. He is in trouble; he does not know what he should do. He asks which of the two alternatives is nobler whether to suffer the cruelties of fate or to stand against the misfortunes of life. He also thinks about another option that is of committing suicide. He philosophizes about why people do not commit suicide. He says, since no living being knows what happens after death and it is fear of that unknown that prevents people from committing suicide. He also says that if this fear were not there many people would have opted for suicide other than going through the hardship of life. He understands that it is human nature to fear the unknown. Though in this soliloquy the dilemma of what Hamlet would do now is not resolved, it is clearly implied that he would not commit suicide. Audiences and readers of all ages have identified themselves with Hamlet here for in some point of their life they must have think of committing suicide and in the next second have discarded the idea in the fear of after life. Not only this one, all of Hamlet's soliloquies are full of wisdom. Along with meaning, his soliloquies are also remarkable for their poetic quality and excellence of language. A very few sane people can make the perfect combination of

wisdom and intelligence of language the way Hamlet does in his soliloquies, let alone those who have even slightly caught madness.

Another very significant confirmation of Hamlet's sanity is his remarks and observations in the gravedigger's scene. To see Yorick's skull, Hamlet remembers his childhood days: "I knew him, Horatio, a fellow / of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy." (Act V, scene i, 156-57). In the graveyard, he philosophizes about the inevitability of death. He says that as Yorick, Alexander the great and Emperor Julius Caesar could not escape death, everyone will meet his/her end someday as well. He is very fascinated by the equalizing effect of death. He compares a jester (Yorick) with a great conqueror (Alexander), that Alexander's condition is same as Yorick's now. To see the skulls in the graveyard he realizes that regardless of their high or low position in their lifetime, all of them had to share the same space after death and most importantly had to go through the same physical decomposition. He then says that it is quite possible that the noble dust of Alexander the great is probably being used to block a hole in a barrel, and that the dust of imperial Caesar is now being used to stop a hole of a wall to prevent the wind from entering in the room.

Since a revenge tragedy is very much a 'male protagonist' centered play, female characters are not given important roles. They are somehow flawed characters. Both Gertrude and Ophelia are 'weak' characters in *Hamlet*. The Queen has a kind of animal nature. She loves to be happy no

matter how odd the situation is and wants to see happy faces around her all the time. She wants Hamlet to “cast thy [his] knighted colour off,”; she does not understand what is there to grief about the dead King! She is also not at all ashamed for her hasty marriage, until Hamlet makes her realize that. She could not be a loyal wife of her first husband the King Hamlet nor could she be a good mother of her son Prince Hamlet. She never but once performs her motherly responsibilities to Hamlet when she lies about his feigned madness to be real to Claudius. At the end of the play she dies an ‘unnecessary’ death, for the poisoned cup is made for Hamlet not for her. However, she is thus killed mistakenly by Claudius.

Ophelia is an utterly passive character. She is fully depended on her father and brother. She does whatever her father and brother ask her to do. She loves Hamlet but stop having any contact with him because her father and brother have told her to do so. She is very submissive and acts like a baby. She never seems to ‘think’ anything, for her father and brother are there to do that for her. Polonius wants her to return all the letters that Hamlet gave her; and she instantly agrees to do that. Then again to cheek Hamlet’s madness Polonius ‘loose my [his] daughter’ on him and Ophelia does not mind to act as a pawn. So when her father dies she is already half-dead, and the absence of her brother in time makes her so grieved that she loses her sanity. And in her ‘madness’ she commits suicide by drowning herself in the river.

Within the broader plot of this play, Shakespeare keeps a sub plot. Fortinbras's story serves as the sub plot. He is the young Prince of Norway and his father was killed by Hamlet's father. Fortinbras wishes to attack Denmark to avenge his father's honor. However, Claudius negotiates with him and succeeds to refrain him from attacking Denmark. This sub plot is there to facilitate the ending of the play. Fortinbras enters Denmark in the last scene. Though, in the last scene all the people of the royal family die, there is a positive sign of a brighter future. It is implied that Fortinbras would take over the throne and that would be the end of the dark chapter of Denmark.

Chapter 4 The play added a new dimension to the genre: *The Duchess of Malfi*

Revenge tragedy was constrained in a very limited time from the mid-1580s to the early 1640s, but this time period covers three different eras—Elizabethan, Jacobean and Caroline period. Major revenge tragedies were written during Elizabethan and Jacobean period. Almost all the revenge tragedies those were written during Elizabethan period followed ‘Kydian formula’ that is, in these plays a wronged revenge-seeker, ghosts, madness, delay, sinister intrigue, a play-within-the-play, torture, multiple murders were common thematic and stylistic aspects. However, after the Elizabethan period, under a new social environment of the Jacobean era, ‘revenge tragedy’ took a new shape. John Webster is one of the most famous revenge tragedy playwrights of this time and *The Duchess of Malfi* was his masterpiece. It is hard to trace that exactly in which year the play was written. However, it is believed to be written before the end of 1614, since William Ostler, who played Antonio in the first performance of this play died on 16 December 1614. since in 1612 Webster was already working on this play, therefore, an agreed upon year in which the play was written is 1613. Webster introduces many new things in this play. It is a macabre⁶ play. The play is about a strong willed woman- the Duchess of Malfi.

The play is set in the court of Malfi, Italy over the period 1504 to 1510. the Duchess of Malfi is a young widow. Her brothers— the Cardinal and the Duke

⁶ Macabre is a quality of certain artistic or literary works, characterized by a grim or ghastly atmosphere. In these works, there is an emphasis on the details and symbols of death.

Ferdinand warn her not to remarry. However, the Duchess does not pay any heed to that and secretly marries Antonio witnessed by Cariola, the Duchess's handmaiden. Antonio is much beneath her social status; he is the steward in her household. The brothers appoint a paid villain, Bosola to spy on her. After a few days, Bosola suspects her of pregnancy and by playing a trick on her confirms his suspicion. Then he passes the news to the brothers. The duke becomes furious with the news but the Cardinal controls himself. The brothers do not take any action until the Duchess gives birth to three children by Antonio. At least minimum four and half years later the brothers think of taking revenge on her for remarrying. The Duke comes and threatens the Duchess with murdering her husband without knowing his identity. Sensing the upcoming danger, the Duchess takes some steps to save her family. Antonio flees to Ancona, and after his exit, hearing his praise from Bosola, the Duchess confides in him all the secrets along with her plan of what she is going to do next. Bosola suggests her to go to near-by shrine of Loretto, and the Duchess accepts the suggestion. The Duchess's brothers come to know about Antonio being Duchess's husband and they become very angry. The Cardinal instructs Bosola to banish them from Ancona and sends soldiers to capture them. Antonio manages to escape with their eldest son, but the Duchess, her maid and her two younger children are returned to Malfi. In imprisonment she is severely tormented and is strangled to death at the hands of executioners under Bosola's supervision by Ferdinand's order. But at this point Ferdinand curses Bosola for killing the Duchess and refuses to give him

any reward. Bosola becomes very angry with Ferdinand and decides to take revenge on him. He finds out that the Cardinal is the main culprit. He then mistakenly kills Antonio thinking him to be the Cardinal. However, later he succeeds in killing the Cardinal as well. And in the fight that follows, Ferdinand and Bosola stab each other to death. Antonio's elder son by the Duchess appears in the final scene, and takes his place as the heir to the Malfi fortune.

Very much like Shakespeare, Webster himself did not invent the story of *The Duchess of Malfi*. He borrowed many things from several sources. First of all, the play *The Duchess of Malfi* has a very strong historical basis. It is based on an actual event that took place in Italy in the early sixteenth century. Again, William Painter's popular collection of stories, *The Palace of Pleasure* (1566 – 1567), and Sir Philip Sidney's romance *Arcadia* (1590) are regarded as Webster's main sources for this play. Though he borrowed many dramatic elements from different sources, he certainly modified the source materials to suit his own themes and dramatic purpose.

When Webster was writing this play, King James was on the throne. This was the time when the two beliefs— the Roman Catholic doctrines and the Protestant faith were not at ease with each other. Along with the shifting religious faith, women's position in this society was also contradictory and continuously shifting. A virgin woman had a very special place for the Roman Catholics and married women were looked down upon and were considered as

less significant beings. However, the Protestant views of virgin women and married women were totally opposite of Catholic views. Single women did not have good reputation if they do not get married before their puberty. They were always on heavy pressure to get married. A single woman did not have any social and legal standing. It was only through marriage, a woman could get some social status, but they still lacked legal rights. However, widows were given more privileges, since they enjoyed legal identity and could claim legal rights. Though a widow could not inherit properties directly, she could hold it legally for her immature son. She also could write her own will. Most importantly, a widow was free to choose her second husband while she did not have this option when she got married for the first time. Though there was no prohibition for a widow to remarry, those who remarried were considered as sexually promiscuous. Since this society was highly patriarchal, women were kept under the control of their father, husband and brother. They were deprived of all their basic human rights. Things were even worse for those women who were in power. The circumstances a female ruler had to face were far different from that of her male counterpart. She had to assume many contradictory qualities at the same time. On one hand, she had to be 'manly' in terms of intelligence, on the other hand she had to appear 'womanly' and 'motherly'; she was to be tough and submissive at the same time. She was surrounded by social restraints and was not allowed to go beyond the boundaries of those limits. In addition, if she ever dared to go against the social boundary, she was subjected to severe punishments.

Keeping this context in mind Webster writes the play *The Duchess of Malfi*. He uses the revenge tragedy themes and features very differently in this play than other revenge tragedies of the time. He does not start working on the theme of revenge from the beginning of the play, he rather explores with other themes. Since in a revenge tragedy, female characters are not given strong and functioning roles, Webster creates a leading female character—the Duchess of Malfi and with her, establishes the theme of a female ruler in this play.

Webster creates a strong willed female character in the Duchess of Malfi, but does not give a very good impression of her being a ruler. As a ruler, she has many responsibilities towards her people. She should remember that by her one wrong decision, the whole state will suffer. As the Duchess of Malfi, her first priority should be the state. But the Duchess does not prove her a good ruler. She prioritizes her private desires over the welfare of the state. First of all, she secretly chooses Antonio—the household steward of her palace as her second husband. While she marries Antonio, she ignores her duty towards her people. She is a public figure and her people have the right to know whether their Duchess is a widow or a married woman. Moreover, without any prior knowledge of her marriage while they saw the Duchess being frequently pregnant and giving birth children one after another, they lose their respect for her. In the beginning of Act III Antonio admits: “The common rabble do directly say she is a strumpet.” Then again, to keep

Duchess's secret intact all the other people had to suffer immensely the night when the Duchess is about to give birth for the first time. Antonio raises a false alarm saying that the Duchess's jewelry have been stolen and asked all the people of the Duchess's palace to keep 'locked' in their rooms. Nobody is allowed to come out from his or her room until next morning. Then again, when Ferdinand comes to know about her secret marriage, she plans to flee to Ancona totally forgetting her duty as a ruler. Public opinion about her marriage to Antonio is also very disapproving. According to a Pilgrim:

Who would have thought
So great a lady would have match'd herself
Unto so mean a person?

Act III, scene iv, 23-25

As a ruler of a state, she cannot marry the steward of her palace. The Duchess's irrational behavior creates a chaotic situation within the state.

Along with her people, she does injustice to her husband and her children as well. Being the husband of the Duchess Antonio should be the Duke and be in power, but since she does not disclose the fact of her marriage, he continues to be her steward. If Antonio were given the power, he probably could have saved his family from the ultimate disaster. Then again, for her foolhardiness her children also suffer. They do not get those privileges they deserve for being the children of the Duchess of Malfi. Though it is not

explicit, it is very likely that they are not allowed to have human contact other than their parents, and Cariola. The Duchess does not prove herself either a good wife or a good mother. Whatever she does, she does that for her own pleasure. She is more of a passionate character than a reasonable one. There is no doubt that she loves her husband and children, but she solely responsible for the disaster that befall on them.

One very important quality of the Duchess is her strong mental strength. She is not a typical feminine character. She dares to defy her brothers' order of not to remarry. Being a woman, she takes the initiative to woo Antonio: "The misery of us that are born great! / We are forc'd to woo, because none dare woo us ;"(Act I, scene i, 433-434). Moreover, to satisfy her 'violent passion' she marries him, though she does not have the courage to expose the marriage. Moreover, even when she becomes pregnant, she continues to go to the court. She does not show much dignity and mental strength until her brother imprisons her. Even after enduring many sufferings, she retains her sanity and it is her enormous mental strength that helps her to do that. In the time of her death, the Duchess is seen most courageous: "I am Duchess of Malfi still." (Act IV, scene ii, 134). Her courage, fortitude and dignity are really admirable. She welcomes her death: "Come, violent death, / Serve for mandragora, to make me sleep:"(Act IV, scene ii, 224-25). Her reaction to death and Cariola's reaction to death are far different for "She bites

and scratches.”(Act IV, scene ii,) but The Duchess does not beg for her life from the executioner even once.

The theme of revenge is handled very differently in this play than other revenge tragedies. The main murder that is to be avenged, occurs very late in the play. Duchess’s brothers warn her not to remarry and if she does remarry the consequence will be dangerous. But when the brothers come to know about her marriage, they keep silence. After at least four and a half years later they decide to take their revenge on her for not listening to them. Why the brothers take such a long time to take their revenge is not understandable. The most important twist of this play is that the literal murderer of the Duchess Bosola later avenges her death. Bosola has no direct animosity with her. He is a paid villain; he sells his service. The Duchess’s brother Ferdinand, being supported by the Cardinal, hires Bosola firstly to spy on her and later to kill her.

Bosola becomes revengeful not only for the murder of Duchess’s family, he is angry with the brothers for they do not give him his reward. In the very beginning of the play Bosola is seen complaining to Cardinal that his service for Cardinal is not being rewarded:

I have done you better service
Than to be slighted thus.

Miserable age, where only the reward
Of doing well, is the doing of it!

(Act I, scene I, 29-32)

He was even imprisoned in galleys and passed two very miserable years there in Cardinal's service. Yet, Cardinal does not seem to value him for his service at all. Bosola knows that Cardinal avoids him ever "since he was in my [his] debt." (Act I, scene ii, 226). Like Cardinal, Ferdinand also hires him for doing something for him by giving him handful of gold coins. He also promises him to give higher position in the court for this job. Bosola trusting him completely, becomes his 'creature'. He does every possible thing for Ferdinand but when the moment of great reward comes, he (Ferdinand) ignores him. Furthermore, Ferdinand curses him for killing the Duchess by his order: "Get thee into some unknown part o'th' world, / That I may never see thee." (Act IV, scene ii, 316-17). Bosola goes to the Cardinal to ask for his reward, but instead of reward, he (the Cardinal) plans to kill him. At this point Bosola becomes very angry with the brothers for making him kill the innocent family of the Duchess and not giving his reward for his service. These two brothers are also responsible for the destruction of Bosola's character; they make him do all the evil deeds. Though Bosola is wicked, his final cause is just and he belatedly assumes the role of an avenger. At the end of the play, he succeeds to kill both the brothers and he is killed as well.

The reason why the Duchess's brothers kill their sister is not a very just reason. Both the brothers have different reasons behind their purpose. With both the purposes, Webster establishes two different themes—incest and corruption. For Ferdinand it is definitely his incestuous feeling for his sister that led him to kill her. He says that to get all the wealth of his sister, he decides to kill her. But this could not be the just cause because even if the Duchess remained widow, her son from her first husband is there to inherit all her property and Ferdinand surely knows that. When he sees the dead face of his sister, he admits that it was "her marriage! / 'That drew a stream of gall quite through my [his] heart.'" (Act IV, scene ii, 276-77), he cannot see her with any other man. Through out the play many instances occur that prove his incestuous feelings for his sister. Ferdinand uses gross language toward his sister and finally calls her a "lusty widow" (Act I, scene ii). When he gets the news of her first baby her second husband, he becomes furious with rage as the Cardinal says: "Why do you make yourself / So wild a tempest?" (Act II, scene v, 16-17). Ferdinand continues to treat her with continued scorn & violent behavior for few years. He hesitates to seek the identity of her husband and wait until the Duchess is dead before attempting to kill Antonio. Ferdinand's use of dead man's hand "Here's a hand/ To which you have vowed much love; the ring upon't/ You gave" (Act IV, scene I, 42-43) suggests a sort of phallic significance. He is so madly in love with the Duchess that after her death he loses his sanity. He repents for his the crime and wants to bring her

back from death. He becomes 'lycanthropic'⁷, which makes him imagine that he is a wolf. He visits graveyards and digs out dead bodies as wolves do. In addition to that, in the fit of madness he throws himself on his own shadow and tries to strangle it. Probably, Ferdinand is feeling guilty that the murdering of the Duchess is the consequence of his incestuous feeling for her.

The cardinal's reason behind killing his sister is not very clear. It is certainly not the Duchess's wealth that make him do take such a decision. For him family honor matters the most. While he talks about family honor and reputation, he is the most crooked man of all. As Antonio describes him as a 'melancholy churchman':

He should have been Pope, but instead of
Coming to it by the primitive decency of the church,
He did bestow bribes so largely, and so impudently, as if he
would
Have carried it away without heaven's knowledge.
(Act I, scene I, 158 - 162)

He is always surrounded by "flatterers, panders, / Intelligencers, atheists, and a thousand such political Monsters." (Act I, scene i, 157-58). He is the murderer, philanderer, and plotter of all evil. He misuses his power and does whatever he pleases. He is the one under whose command Bosola did the 'notorious murder', but does not give Bosola his reward for doing that. He is having a relation with Julia but does not have any feelings for her and towards

⁷ A disease that makes its patient think of him as a werewolf.

the end of the play he kills her. He is a cold-blooded murderer. He is responsible for the killing of the Duchess and her family; he also plans to kill Bosola as well. But at the end he is trapped by his own trick; he cries for help when Bosola tries to kill him, but nobody comes to help him. Thus, he dies at the hand of Bosola.

Apart from the themes of female ruler, revenge, incest, corruption misogyny is also a theme of this play. The protagonist Bosola is misogynistic. He cannot stand woman and calls the closet of a woman a 'shop of witchcraft':

One would suspect it for a shop of witchcraft,
To find in it the fat of serpents, spawn of snakes, Jews' spittle,
And their young childrens' ordure; and all these for the face.

(Act I, scene ii, 38-40)

He is very cynical about women in general. When the old woman says to Bosola he abuses women, he admits "only, by the way, now and then, / Mention your frailty." (Act II, scene ii, 13). He is always very hateful about woman. It is ironic that towards the end of the play he feels sorry for a lusty woman like Julia and gives his life to avenge the murder of a woman (the Duchess).

Bosola is probably the most different of all the protagonists in the genre of revenge tragedy. He is not by nature an evil person. He has done things "Much 'gainst mine [his] own good nature," (Act V, scene v, 85) for his necessity (to earn money). He is knowledgeable and knows whatever he does is not morally right:

Take your devils,
Which hell calls angels: these curs'd gifts would make
You a corrupter, me an impudent traitor;
And should I take these, they'd take me to hell.

(Act I, scene i, 256-59)

Though he does evil deeds, he does not transform into a devil. He is rather a scholar and philosopher. Delio describes him a 'fantastical scholar': "Like such who study to know how many knots was in / Hercules' club, of what colour Achilles' beard was, / Or whether Hector were not troubled / With the tooth-ache." (Act III, scene iii, 40-45). Other than Delio's this description of Bosola as a pretentious scholar of classical learning, nothing else is made of this characteristic. However, this much description is enough to prove his scholarly knowledge. He is also a philosopher; time to time, he philosophizes about different things. When he mistakenly kills Antonio, he says: "We are merely the stars' tennis balls, struck and banded / Which way please them." (Act V, scene iv, 54-55). He understands that we cannot control our actions all

the time, something is there called fate and we cannot avoid that. Even being misogynistic, he requests Ferdinand to stop tormenting the Duchess. He feels really sorry for the Duchess.

In this play, Webster added many new revenge tragedy features—spying and co incidence are two such features. In the starting act Ferdinand hires him by giving him some gold coins and makes him his “a very quaint invisible devil in flesh; / As intelligencer.”(Act I, scene I, 253). Bosola truly becomes his master’s “creature” and pass on whatever he comes to know about the Duchess to her brothers. He is the one who informs them about her pregnancy and about her newborn child. He also gains Duchess’s confidence and finds out who her husband is from her own mouth. He informs the brothers about her plan to flee to Ancona. When the Duchess reaches to Ancona, he arrests her and troubles her by Ferdinand’s order. Moreover, it is he under whose supervision the Duchess is killed mercilessly along with her son and daughter and the handmaid Cariola.

The element of co-incidence has been used in this play very effectively. The night the Duchess gives birth to her first son, Antonio is caught by Bosola with the horoscope of the Duchess’s newborn son, but co-incidentally only the father’s name is blotted-out with the blood of Antonio’s nose that suddenly starts bleeding. Then again, the Duchess confides in Bosola

with all her secrets, who happens to be that person who is spying on her. then again, the clichéd revenge tragedy feature— the ghost is not there in *The Duchess of Malfi*, Webster replaces the place of the ghost with the echo. It warns Antonio not to go near the Cardinal's palace. It also warns him to "*Be mindful of thy [his] Safety*" (Act V, scene iii, 32) and to "*fly your [his] fate*" (Act V, scene iii, 35). The echo also tells her that he will "*Never see her [the Duchess] more*" (Act V, scene iii, 41). Since it is a macabre play, there are many grotesque scenes in the play. And, it is Webster's specialty that he creates a ghostly atmosphere without the ghost. Waxen body parts, werewolf digging the body parts out from the graves, all these contribute to deepen the grotesque atmosphere of the play.

No matter how grotesque and somber situation is shown in the play, it ends with a positive sign. At the end of the play all the corrupted people die, and it implies that this is the end of all evils. Antonio's elder son becomes the Duke of Malfi and a good character Delio is there to guide him.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

If we carefully examine all the three plays, we will be able to dictate how the genre of revenge tragedy has evolved. Though it is not possible to show exactly how the genre developed by examining only three plays, we can certainly get a good idea of how things changed. *The Spanish Tragedy* by Thomas Kyd is the first revenge tragedy, so from this play we can see what are the essential features of a revenge tragedy; in *Hamlet*, Shakespeare experiments with the features and further elaborates them; and in *The Duchess of Malfi* Webster uses the features entirely differently and also adds new features of his own.

In a revenge tragedy, revenge is obviously the main theme. Since *The Spanish Tragedy* was the first revenge tragedy, Kyd had a major task to establish a contradictory theme of that time. Therefore, he repeatedly tried to connect revenge with divine justice. In the beginning of the play he showed that revenge has been sanctioned by the under world Queen Proserpine. Then again, the avenger Hieronimo is a Knight Marshal; he decides the punishment of a criminal according to his crime. Therefore, when this man kills his son's murderers to perform his duty as a father and a Judge, it is more of a justice rather than revenge. But, Shakespeare did not worry much about the theme of 'revenge', because by the time he was writing *Hamlet* it was already established. Therefore, he had a good opportunity to explore with themes other than revenge. The responsibility to avenge his father's murder is thrust

upon Hamlet by the ghost and he is not very happy to get the task. That is why in spite of having all the evidence against Claudius, Hamlet hesitates to kill him. He takes a long time to make up his mind. In addition, he does not carry out the revenge until he himself is dying. By Hamlet's procrastination, Shakespeare shows that not everyone can do whatever he/she is asked to. Then again, in *The Duchess of Malfi* Webster handled the theme of revenge entirely differently than *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Hamlet*. In the case of *The Duchess of Malfi*, the Duchess is killed under her brothers' instruction and Bosola who is her literal murderer avenges her death. The Duchess's husband Antonio comes to know about his wife and children's murder just before his death, so there is no question of avenging their deaths from his part. In addition, Bosola does not kill the wicked brothers only to avenge her death; he kills them because they are responsible for corrupting his nature.

Apart from the theme of revenge in revenge tragedy, some other themes are also there. Incest, misogyny these are used as minor themes. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, there is no such theme of incest. *Hamlet* is probably the first Elizabethan revenge tragedy that use incest as a theme. Hamlet is incestuous towards his mother and Lear is incestuous towards his sister. However, in this play no action is directly influenced by the incestuous desire. But in *The Duchess of Malfi* incest is a very important theme. The Duke Ferdinand has an incestuous feeling for his sister. He torments her severely out of his acute incestuous feeling for her. Moreover, he does not even hesitate to kill her

mercilessly. Later he realizes his mistake and loses his sanity. In *The Duchess of Malfi* there is also a sex related minor theme and it is the theme of extra marital affair. The Cardinal and Julia have a sexual relationship but share no real feelings for each other. Like incest and extra marital affair, misogyny is another minor theme used in revenge tragedy. In *The Spanish Tragedy* this theme is not there. However, it is very much there in *Hamlet*. Hamlet was not a misogynist before, but seeing his mother's hasty remarriage he starts hating the women species in general and Ophelia's rejection to him deepens that even more. Hamlet thinks that every woman is a potential whore. Then again, in *The Duchess of Malfi* the misogynistic Bosola shows a very condescending attitude towards women. He thinks women are witches and whores. He also considers them to be foolish and who can be easily tricked. He actually represents the Jacobean attitude toward women.

The most important character of a revenge tragedy is the avenger. Much attention is put to create a perfect hero according to the need of the story. Hieronimo is the very first hero of English revenge tragedy. He is an elderly man, father of an eligible son Horatio. He is the Knight Marshal of the Spanish court, a man of high official. He is very well known as a just judge. His innocent son is killed and in grief for her son, his wife commits suicide. So, he is left with nobody in life whom he would wish to live for. He actively avenges he son's murder and at the end commits suicide. In contrast to

Hieronimo, Hamlet is a university going young prince and is in love with the beautiful Ophelia. He is a scholar, philosopher, a poet and most importantly, the future King. His uncle Claudius kills his father and within one month, his mother marries Claudius. Hamlet is immensely grieved by his father's death and at the same time very agitated with his mother's remarriage. He knows that his father has already died and for killing him, Claudius would be punished after his death, but if he (Hamlet) avenges his father's murder, he himself would be punished as well. Hamlet hesitates and lingers his revenge. And in the course of his procrastination, Ophelia commits suicide for Hamlet has killed her father. He does take initiative to kill Claudius only then when Claudius kills his mother and he (Hamlet) himself is poisoned by his (Claudius's) trick. And, in the case of *The Duchess of Malfi*, the protagonist is Bosola- a paid villain. He is the malcontent of the court and a murderer. He is hired to keep an eye on the Duchess. He does his spying job extremely well. He arrests her, torments her in prison and also kills her. He is responsible for all the problems the Duchess faces. And when he does not get his reward for doing his job, he feels sorry for her and decides to avenge her death. Like other revenge tragedies, the actions of this play are not at all motivated by revenge intrigue.

Since in a revenge tragedy the avenger is always a 'male' character, the main female character is subsided by that character. Most of the time the heroine of a revenge tragedy is a flat character; she is either a very innocent

and too submissive character or she is too rough and strong, lacking all the feminine qualities. For example, in *The Spanish Tragedy* Bel-imperia is a flat character though she is a very strong woman. In this play, she is the one who thinks of 'revenge' for the first time against Andrea's murderer. She is used as a tool for carrying out the revenge. She is more of a Hieronimo's helping hand in the play. Moreover, while she plans against her own brother Lorenzo, she does not show any sisterly concern for him. She succeeds to avenge her lovers' murder and at the end commits suicide. She is strong but her extraordinary strength makes her a flat character. Where as in *The Spanish Tragedy* Bel-imperia is too strong character, in *Hamlet* Ophelia is a too naïve and submissive character. She has no confidence of her own; she is fully depended on her father and brother. At times, it seems that she is a puppet; she does whatever her father and brother ask her to do. Another female character Gertrude is also a flawed character. She is neither naïve nor cunning. There is something beastly in her; she thinks of her sensual pleasure first and then she thinks of her son. Unlike the female characters of *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Hamlet* in *The Duchess of Malfi* the main female character is more or less a round character. She is not either submissive or too feminine a character. Unlike the other two heroines, she is not that young and beautiful. She has this much courage to ignore her brothers' warning, but she is not that courageous to disclose the news of her marriage. Then again, though she is not willing to give Antonio his right to be the Duke as her husband, she does not deny all his husbandly rights and gives birth to his children. The most important quality of

her character is that she has a very strong sense of self-respect. This quality is missing from all the female characters in the other two plays. When she sees her executioners, she is not frightened at all. She does not even beg for her life to them because she is not willing to stoop so low.

The presence of a supernatural element is very a common feature of revenge tragedy. Most of the time, it is the ghost that of the murdered person that calls for revenge. Starting from *The Spanish Tragedy* to all most in all the early Elizabethan revenge tragedy the ghost plays a very important role. Although, in *The Spanish Tragedy*, the ghost of Andrea serves as a chorus and has no direct contact with the living, its role is significant. In *Hamlet*, the ghost asks Hamlet to avenge his murder, and provides him with crucial information about the murder. However, as a Renaissance man Hamlet questions the existence of the ghost. In the later revenge tragedy, there are natural or supernatural signals as the replacement of the ghost. In *The Duchess of Malfi*, Antonio hears an echo that his wife and children are dead. This echo warns Antonio to go near the residence of the Cardinal, and that he is a 'dead thing'.

Since it is not possible for the protagonists of revenge tragedy to achieve their desired ends through officially sanctioned means, they need much time to build a plot against the wrongdoer. Madness is one of the most important devices by which the avenger can divert the attention of the wrongdoer from them for a short period. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hieronimo

pretends to be mad, so that Lorenzo and Balthazar do not suspect him of planning against them. His madness is feigned but nobody could understand that. Hamlet also pretends to be mad to keep a safer distance from Claudius, but except Ophelia, everybody understands that his is a feigned madness. But in *The duchess of Malfi* madness takes a different form. The actual murderer Ferdinand himself becomes mad and his madness is not feigned. He is so grieved for his sister that he loses his sanity. Then again, a group of madman is let loose to add to the Duchess's torment. The madmen talk about most timely thought of that time. They talk about doomsday, death, lechery and corruption.

From the above explanation, we can see that the changes have been made in the genre of revenge tragedy gradually. The early revenge tragedies had to establish many themes for the first time, so the early playwrights narrow down their themes and explained those themes they have used thoroughly. Whilst, the later revenge tragedies had the advantage to elaborate the established themes further and to introduce new themes. The radical changes were made from Elizabethan time to Jacobean period. Playwrights of Elizabethan revenge tragedy worked with conventional revenge tragedy features with or without slightest changes. However, the great shift was made after the shift from Elizabethan period to Jacobean period. For example, in the Elizabethan and early Jacobean plays that is, in *The Spanish Tragedy*, *The Jew of Malta*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Hamlet*, *Hoffman*, *The Revenger's Tragedy*,

Antonio's Tragedy, etc— the avenger is the protagonist, but, in the later revenge tragedies there are avengers like Giovanni (*'Tis Pity She's a Whore*) or Livia (*Women beware Women*) whose motives are far more questionable. In one of the late plays *The Duke of Milan*, the villainous Francisco turns out to be a seriously wronged character as his sister was seduced and abandoned by the Duke. The most complex is perhaps *The Duchess of Malfi* where the avenger is the murderer of the dead. Nevertheless, not many changes were made from Jacobean period to Caroline period. In this period, playwrights elaborated the Jacobean themes further but they did not succeed to make something extremely new.

Work Cited

Primary Texts:

Kyd, Thomas. *The Spanish Tragedy*. Ed. J. R. Mulryne. London: A & C Black (Publishers) Limited, 1990.

Webster, John. *The Duchess of Malfi*. Ed. Brian Gibbons. 4th ed. London: A & C Black (Publishers) Limited, 2001.

William, Shakespeare. *Hamlet*. Ed. Philip Edwards. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Secondary Texts:

Griswold, Wendy. *Renaissance Revivals: City Comedy and Revenge Tragedy in the London Theatre, 1576-1980*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

Nicoll, Allardyce. *British Drama*. 5th ed. Delhi: Doaba House, 1988.

Bradley, A. C. *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth*. 2nd ed. London: Macmillan, 1905.

Lucas, F.L. *Seneca and Elizabethan Tragedy*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1922.

Kitto, H.D.F. *Form and meaning in Drama*. Great Britain: T & A. Constable Ltd, 1969.

Bowers, Fredson. *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy*. United States of America: Princeton University Press, 1971.